AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) ~~Bleached crosslinked~~ Crosslinked cellulosic fibers, comprising bleached polycarboxylic acid crosslinked~~cellulose~~ cellulosic fibers and a polyol ~~crosslinked with an effective amount of a polyacrylic crosslinking agent in the presence of 1 to 10% by weight cellulose of a C_4-C_{12} polyol and bleached after curing with a bleaching agent, said bleached crosslinked fibers having a~~ wherein the Whiteness Index is at least one unit greater than unbleached crosslinked cellulosic fiber comprising polycarboxylic crosslinked ~~cellulose~~ cellulosic fibers and a polyol. ~~comprising cellulosic fibers crosslinked with an effective amount of a crosslinking agent in the presence of 1 to 10 % by weight of a C_4-C_{12} polyol without bleaching wherein said crosslinked fibers prepared without bleaching have a Whiteness Index of at least about 70 and wherein said Whiteness Index is measured after curing at 182°C and 215°C.~~

2. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the crosslinking agent is an α-hydroxypolycarboxylic acid.

3. (Original) The fibers of Claim 2, wherein the α-hydroxypolycarboxylic acid is selected from the group consisting of citric acid, malic acid, tartaric acid, tartronic acid, α-hydroxyglutaric acid, and citramalic acid and mixtures thereof.

4. (Original) The fibers of Claim 3, wherein the crosslinking agent is citric acid.

5. (Original) The fibers of Claim 3, wherein the crosslinking agent is malic acid.

6. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the polyol is selected from the group consisting of acyclic polyols, alicyclic polyols, and heterosides and mixtures thereof.

7. (Original) The fibers of Claim 6, wherein the acyclic polyol is selected from the group consisting of erythritol, xylitol, arabitol, ribitol, sorbitol, mannitol, perseitol, and volemitol and mixtures thereof.

8. (Original) The fibers of Claim 7, wherein the acyclic polyol is sorbitol.

9. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide.

10. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide in combination with sodium hydroxide.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Canceled)

13. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the wet bulk is about 15.5 cc/g or greater.

14. (Canceled)

15. (Canceled)

16. (Canceled)

17 (Previously Presented) The fibers of Claim 1 wherein said bleached crosslinked fibers have a brightness greater than about 80.

18. (New) Crosslinked celluosic fibers comprising air dried cellulosic pulp fibers crosslinked with a polycarboxylic acid in the presence of a polyol and then bleached wherein the Whiteness Index is at least one unit greater than crosslinked cellulosic fibers comprising air dried cellulosic pulp fibers crosslinked with a polycarboxylic acid in the presence of a polyol and not bleached.

19. (New) The fibers of Claim 18, wherein the crosslinking agent is an α-hydroxypolycarboxylic acid.

20. (New) The fibers of Claim 19, wherein the α-hydroxypolycarboxylic acid is selected from the group consisting of citric acid, malic acid, tartaric acid, tartronic acid, α-hydroxyglutaric acid, and citramalic acid and mixtures thereof.

21. (New) The fibers of Claim 20, wherein the crosslinking agent is citric acid.

22. (New) The fibers of Claim 20, wherein the crosslinking agent is malic acid.

23. (New) The fibers of Claim 18, wherein the polyol is selected from the group consisting of acyclic polyols, alicyclic polyols, and heterosides and mixtures thereof.

24. (New) The fibers of Claim 23, wherein the acyclic polyol is selected from the group consisting of erythritol, xylitol, arabitol, ribitol, sorbitol, mannitol, perseitol, and volemitol and mixtures thereof.

25. (New) The fibers of Claim 24, wherein the acyclic polyol is sorbitol.

26. (New) The fibers of Claim 18, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide.

27. (New) The fibers of Claim 18, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide in combination with sodium hydroxide.

28. (New) The fibers of Claim 18, wherein the wet bulk is about 15.5 cc/g or greater.

30. (New) The fibers of Claim 18 wherein said bleached crosslinked fibers have a brightness greater than about 80.